

Message Text

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E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, MARA, ET, CH, US

SUBJ: DISCUSSION WITH FONMIN ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE

REF: STATE 019589

1. SUMMARY: IN CALL ON FONMIN DR. MINASSIE FEBRUARY 14 I TOLD HIM THAT, IN LIGHT OF A REPORTED FORTHCOMING VISIT TO ETHIOPIA BY A CHINESE MILITARY MISSION, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE ADVISABLE TO CONSULT IN ADVANCE IF THE IEG SHOULD CONTEMPLATE THE ACQUISITION OF SPECIFIC MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE CHINESE. THIS WAS DESIRABLE BECAUSE ACQUISITION FROM THE CHINESE COULD JEOPARDIZE CURRENT LEVELS OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE. ESSENCE OF DR. MINASSIE'S REPLY WAS THAT IEG WOULD CERTAINLY CONSULT USG BEFORE TAKING ANY SUCH DECISION AND THAT SUCH DECISION WOULD CERTAINLY NOT OCCUR BEFORE HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON IN MARCH. IN COURSE OF CONVERSATION DR. MINASSIE MADE CLEAR THAT IEG HOPES USG HAS NOT GIVEN UP THOUGHT OF OBTAINING FACILITIES IN ASMARA TO SUPPORT INDIAN OCEAN TASK GROUP.

2. I TOLD DR. MINASSIE EMBASSY HAD HEARD RUMORS THAT A

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CHINESE MILITARY MISSION WOULD SOON VISIT ETHIOPIA. HE WOULD

RECALL THAT ASSISTANT SECRETARY NEWSOM HAD TOLD PRIME MINISTER AND HIM LAST NOVEMBER THAT AN ETHIOPIAN DECISION TO ACQUIRE MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM THE CHINESE COULD JEOPARDIZE CURRENT LEVELS OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS CONGRESSIONAL REACTION. I THOUGHT IT APPROPRIATE AT PRESENT TO POINT OUT THAT THIS REMAINS THE CASE. IN ADDITION, EMBASSY HAD SINCE RECEIVED INDICATION FROM WASHINGTON THAT AN IEG DECISION TO ACQUIRE SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM WESTERN EUROPEAN SOURCES COULD ALSO POSE PROBLEMS FOR OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE LEVELS, THOUGH NOT OF THE SAME DIMENSIONS. IT WOULD THEREFORE APPEAR PRUDENT TO DISCUSS TOGETHER ANY POTENTIAL PURCHASES OF THAT TYPE IN ADVANCE OF HARD AND FAST DECISIONS. I EMPHASIZED TO DR. MINASSIE THAT I WAS MAKING THESE POINTS IN ORDER TO BE HELPFUL AND TO MINIMIZE THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY UNPLEASANT SURPRISES IN THE COURSE OF FUTURE IEG-USG RELATIONS.

3. DR. MINASSIE RESPONDED THAT THE IEG WAS "DISAPPOINTED" THAT IT HAD "FAILED" TO CONVINCE THE USG OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SOVIET-SOMALI THREAT TO ETHIOPIA. THE IEG'S CONCERN ON THIS SCORE HAD BEEN CREATED NOT BY SOMALI POWER, BUT BY THE VAST SOVIET RESOURCES WHICH STOOD SQUARELY BEHIND SOMALIA. THE IEG HAD THEREFORE BEEN FORCED TO THINK ABOUT OTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR INSURING ITS SECURITY. NEVERTHELESS THEY HAD NOT TURNED TO THE SOVIETS, WHO HAD OFFERED MILITARY ASSISTANCE "IN THE PAST -- I DON'T KNOW ABOUT NOW". AS HE HAD MENTIONED TO ASST. SECRETARY NEWSOM, THE CHINESE HAD EXPRESSED COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOVIET-SOMALI THREAT AND HAD CLEARLY IMPLIED A WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE THE IEG WITH MILITARY ASSISTANCE. NEVERTHELESS, NOTHING DEFINITE HAD BEEN ARRANGED OR DECIDED UPON. DR. MINASSIE ASSURED ME THAT THE IEG IS NOT ONLY FULLY AWARE OF ITS OBLIGATION, BUT STRONGLY DESIRES, TO CONSULT WITH THE USG BEFORE UNDERTAKING ANY MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMITMENTS WITH THE CHINESE. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE EMPEROR IS NOT A "CAPRICIOUS" INDIVIDUAL AND THAT PROBABLY HIS MAJESTY WOULD EVEN WRITE TO PRESIDENT NIXON BEFORE CONCLUDING A MILITARY ASSISTANCE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE CHINESE. HE ADDED THAT THERE WOULD CERTAINLY BE NO AFFIRMATIVE DECISION REGARDING CHINESE MILITARY ASSISTANCE BEFORE HIS MARCH TRIP TO WASHINGTON.

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4. I THANKED DR. MINASSIE FOR THESE ASSURANCES AND BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE GREAT DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED IN OBTAINING THE CURRENT MAP LEVEL FOR FY-74. I ALSO SAID THZKEMBASSY WANTED TO BE HELPFUL IN ANY WAY IT COULD WITH REGARD TO HIS WASHINGTON TRIP.

5. DR. MINASSIE THEN SAID THAT "CANDIDLY AND JUST BETWEEN

US", IT MADE HIM RATHER UNHAPPY THAT (1) CONGRESS WAS NOT WILLING TO PROVIDE THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE THAT ETHIOPIA NEEDED BUT (2) MIGHT CUT OFF ALL US MILITARY ASSISTANCE IF ETHIOPIA TURNED ELSEWHERE IN DESPERATION. PRINCIPAL POINT I MADE IN REPLY WAS THAT NO ONE COULD PREDICT CONGRESSIONAL REACTION ON SUCH A MATTER WITH COMPLETE CONFIDENCE BUT THAT CONGRESS HAD HISTORICALLY TENDED TO WRITE OFF IN TERMS OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE A COUNTRY WHICH HAD TURNED TO SOVIET UNION OR CHINESE AS A PRINCIPAL ARMS SUPPLIER. I THOUGHT THAT, IN VIEW OF TRADITIONAL US-ETHIOPIAN FRIENDSHIP, CONGRESS MIGHT NOT REACT IN THIS FASHION IF IT FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE DEPTH OF THE IEG'S MILITARY CONCERNS, BUT THAT THIS UNDERSTANDING CERTAINLY DOES NOT EXIST AT PRESENT.

6. TOWARDS END OF OUR CONVERSATION DR. MINASSIE BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF DIEGO GARCIA. AFTER A REFERENCE TO IT, HE SAID HE HOPED EMBASSY HAD MADE CLEAR, IN ITS REPORT ON THE DISCUSSION WITH HIS MAJESTY REGARDING POSSIBLE ASMARA SUPPORT FACILITIES FOR THE INDIAN OCEAN TASK GROUP, THAT THE IEG HAD NOT WISHED TO "FORECLOSE" THIS ISSUE. THE EMPEROR WAS QUITE PREPARED TO TAKE ON EVEN LARGER-SCALE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE USG, BUT ONLY IF THE IEG'S INCREASED SECURITY NEEDS WERE PROVIDED FOR. HE THEREFORE HOPED THAT WASHINGTON MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING MORE TO SAY ON THIS SUBJECT. I REPLIED THAT WASHINGTON HAD PROBABLY NOT RETURNED TO THIS QUESTION BECAUSE IT KNEW THAT THE IEG WANTED INCREASED MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND IT SAW NO WAY AS YET OF PROVIDING THIS.

7. DR. MINASSIE ALSO MADE SOME REMARKS INDICATING THAT HE THOUGHT EVEN THE EXPANDED FACILITIES AT DIEGO GARCIA WOULD BY NO MEANS BE ADEQUATE TO COUNTER THE LARGE SOVIET PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE SOVIET BASE IN SOMALIA. HE ADDED THAT, WHILE IT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR A COUNTRY TO
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FORESEE THE PRECISE NATURE OF ITS FUTURE NEEDS IN A GIVEN AREA, HE WOULD THINK THE USG WOULD WANT A CONSIDERABLY MORE SUBSTANTIAL BASE THAN DIEGO GARCIA TO PROTECT ITS FUTURE INTERESTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.

8. COMMENT: THE STRONGEST IMPRESSIONS I DREW FROM THIS CONVERSATION ARE THE FOLLOWING:

(A) DESPITE THE GRAVE VIEW THE IEG TAKES OF THE SOMALI THREAT, THE EMPEROR IS VERY RELUCTANT TO ABANDON HIS TRADITIONAL RELIANCE ON THE US AND TO TAKE ON A SUBSTANTIAL ASSISTANCE/DEPENDENCE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA.

(B) THE IEG HAS PROBABLY NOT GIVEN UP THE VIEW THAT A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE LEVEL OF US MILITARY ASSISTANCE IS STILL POSSIBLE. THE RECENT MIDDLE EAST WAR, THE OIL CRISIS, THE PROSPECTIVE OPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL, THE RECENT US APPROACH

REGARDING SUPPORT FACILITIES IN ASMARA, AND THE PLANNED
EXPANSION OF DIEGO GARCIA HAVE GIVEN THE EMPEROR AND FONMIN
NEW REASON TO HOPE THAT THE USG IS RE-EVALUATING THE STRATEGIC
SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHIOPIA AND MIGHT CONSEQUENTLY INCREASE
ITS MILITARY ASSISTANCE. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE
EMPEROR PROBABLY ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE FONMIN'S
FORTHCOMING WASHINGTON VISIT. WYMAN

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